



Testimony of Chris Phelps, State Director, Environment Connecticut
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Energy & Technology Committee

March 3, 2022

RE:

[SB 176](#): AN ACT CONCERNING SHARED CLEAN ENERGY FACILITIES.

[HB 5200](#): AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY HYDROGEN POWER

[HB 5202](#): AN ACT EXEMPTING EXISTING NUCLEAR POWER GENERATING FACILITIES IN THE STATE FROM THE NUCLEAR POWER FACILITY CONSTRUCTION MORATORIUM

Senator Needleman, Representative Arconti, Senator Formica, Representative Ferraro, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of Environment Connecticut. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan environmental advocate working for clean air, clean water, clean energy, open spaces, and a safe climate.

Global warming and climate change represent direct and growing threats to our economic future, public health and safety, and the stability of our society. Decades of policy and political debate have produced some progress towards mitigating the problem, but to-date, the response of local, state, and federal governments has failed to keep pace with the threat of climate change. Today, the facts of this issue are clear. Simply put, we must end the use of fossil fuels in our economy, transition to 100% renewable energy, and do so within the next 10-20 years.

Connecticut has made some strides fighting climate change. The Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA), setting pollution reduction targets, combined with growth in solar and wind energy commitments over the past decade are a start. But the state is still not on track to achieve its mandatory statutory targets for reducing the pollution that causes global warming and climate change. We must do more to eliminate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from energy sources used for transportation, heating, cooling, and electricity generation. Policy makers should prioritize approaches that

maximize the pace of our transition to 100% clean and renewable energy, while rejecting energy sources that would extend our reliance on dirty and dangerous energy.

SB 176: AN ACT CONCERNING SHARED CLEAN ENERGY FACILITIES.

Environment Connecticut supports the goal of this bill to increase the amount of new solar generation built in Connecticut under certain shared clean energy (SCEF) and related programs. Our state can and should dramatically increase our commitment to accelerating the pace of solar development. Unfortunately, this bill maintains the existing solar policy status quo in Connecticut. Namely, it is premised on the idea that, while Connecticut wants *some* new solar generation, it does not want “*too much*” solar.

If Connecticut is going to achieve the goal of ending dependence on fossil fuels such as methane gas, then policy makers must shift their thinking away from a focus on constraining the pace of renewable energy growth and instead seek reasonable and realistic solutions that enable the state to accelerate its transition to 100% clean and renewable energy.

Specifically, we recommend that SB 176 be amended to increase the SCEF program cap to *at least* 50MW annually. Additionally, we recommend that the Non-Residential Renewable Energy Tariff cap be increased to at least 100MW annually.

In addition to raising the annual caps on solar deployment, we strongly recommend that the committee remove the requirement in the bill that at least 40% of SCEFs are located in Environmental Justice Communities. This requirement increases siting constraints for SCEF projects and does nothing to benefit the residents of such communities.

Finally, we respectfully recommend that the committee give consideration to the potential benefits to be gained from further loosening, or eliminating altogether, the annual program caps on the state’s entire suite of solar programs, both commercial and residential. Doing so would enable the marketplace to accelerate growth in solar power, in turn accelerating the state’s progress towards its climate targets, while also giving more of its residents and businesses the opportunity to get off fossil fuels and go 100% renewable.

HB 5200: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY HYDROGEN POWER

HB 5200 would establish a task force to “study hydrogen-fueled energy in the state’s economy and energy infrastructure.”

Environment Connecticut does not oppose a study of the question of whether or how the state should continue to incentivize a transition to reliance on hydrogen to meet some of its energy needs. However, so far such incentives for hydrogen have served to extend the state's reliance upon fossil fuel because almost all hydrogen currently used for energy generation is derived from methane gas and other fossil fuels. As such, any serious study of the future role of hydrogen in our energy mix should focus on hydrogen derived from 100% renewable energy sources. An additional concern with HB 5200 is that the composition of the proposed task force almost entirely consists of hydrogen and other energy industry interests, with just a single member representing environmental advocacy organizations and no representatives speaking to consumer or other public interest concerns.

Due to these concerns, Environment Connecticut does not support HB 5200 in its current form and we respectfully recommend that the bill be amended to require that the proposed task force restrict its work to studying opportunities for expanding hydrogen energy use in the state that is derived from renewable energy sources, not from fossil fuels. Additionally, we recommend that the composition of the task force be amended to better reflect a wider array of environmental, consumer, and other public interest voices.

HB 5202: AN ACT EXEMPTING EXISTING NUCLEAR POWER GENERATING FACILITIES IN THE STATE FROM THE NUCLEAR POWER FACILITY CONSTRUCTION MORATORIUM

HB 5202 repeals the existing moratorium on new nuclear power facility construction specifically at the site of the existing Millstone nuclear power plant. Environment Connecticut strongly opposes this bill and urges its rejection. While proponents of new nuclear power generation often suggest that it is an immediately available and affordable way to decarbonize our electric grid, the reality is construction of new nuclear power reactors in Connecticut would likely take well over a decade to complete and cost tens of billions of dollars - and expense that would undoubtedly be passed on to the state's taxpayers and ratepayers. Other nuclear proponents suggest that legislation such as HB 5202 might allow for construction of so-called advanced small modular reactors. However, even those proponents would likely acknowledge that such reactors have not yet achieved commercial viability, and are unlikely to do so for the foreseeable future.

Connecticut's need for new sources of clean and carbon-free energy sources to decarbonize its grid is immediate and cannot be deferred for years and decades to come in hopes that hypothetical advances in nuclear technology will prove technically and economically viable. Rather than chase the potential for future technological

breakthroughs in nuclear power, we respectfully recommend that the committee reject HB 5202 and focus on the 100% renewable energy generation and energy storage technologies that are available to meet our needs today.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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